SCOTT SNYDER • JAVI FERNÁNDEZ • ALEJANDRO SÁNCHEZ

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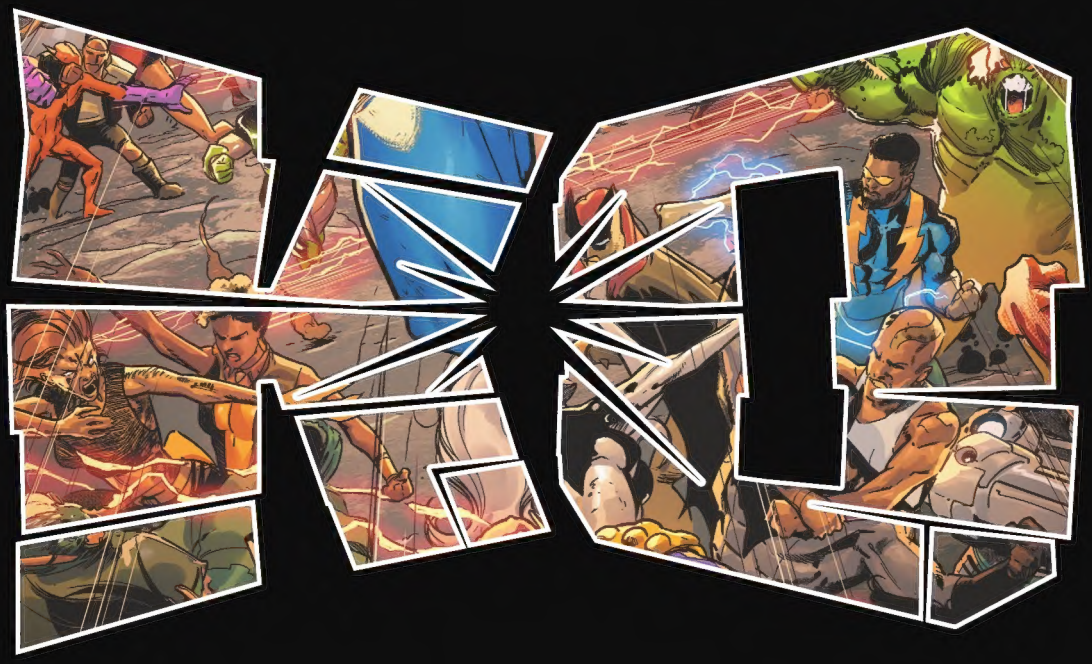

A DC COMICS EVENT

13+ TEEN

1

This school has secrets. So does she.
GOTHAM ACADEMY
FIRST YEAR
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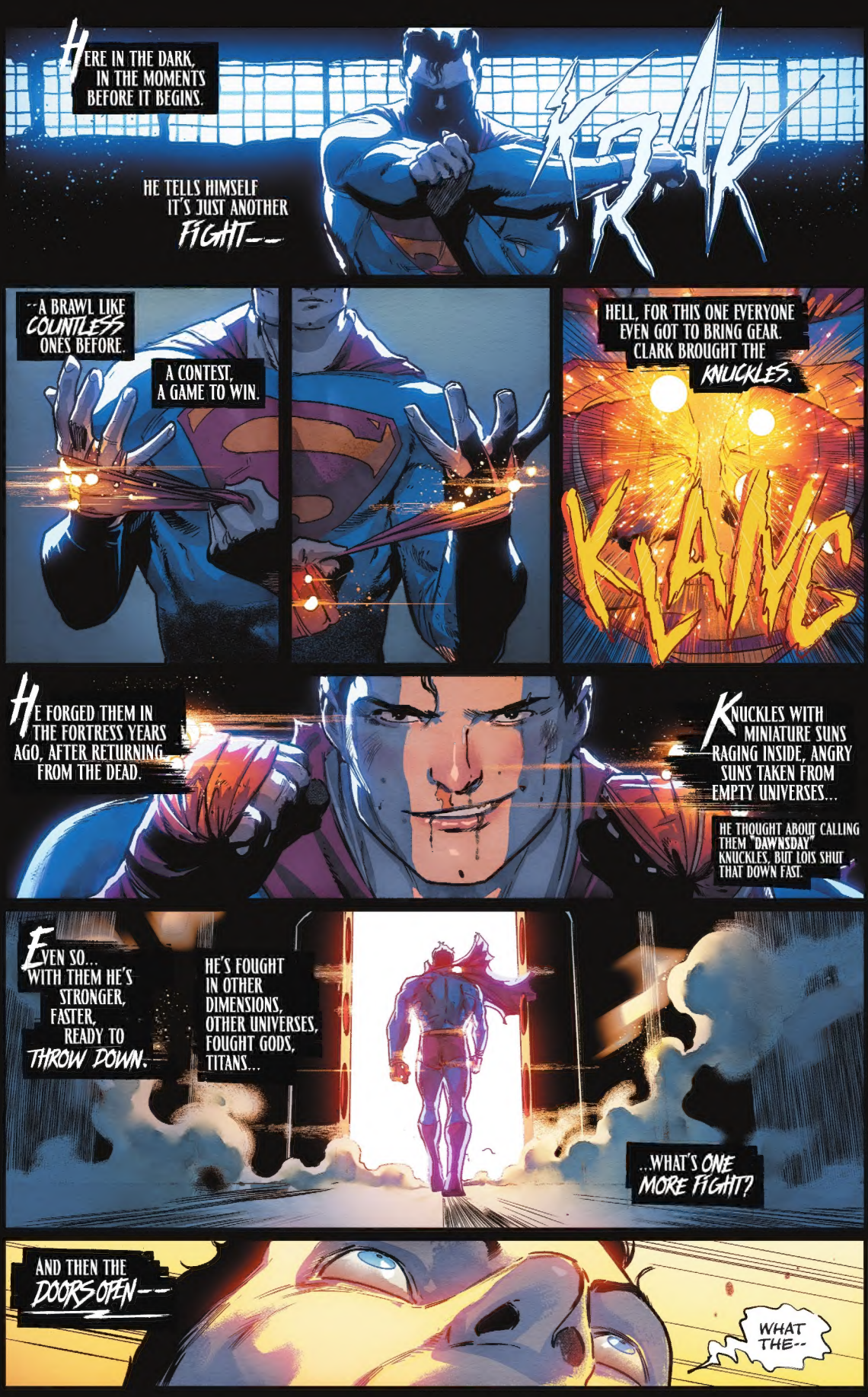
Writers
BRENDEN FLETCHER,
KARL KERSCHL,
and BECKY CLOONAN
return to the fan-favorite series
Art by
MARCO FERRARI
Covers by KARL KERSCHL
DC
6 issues
Go back to school this
OCTOBER


HERE IN THE DARK, IN THE MOMENTS BEFORE IT BEGINS.
HE TELLS HIMSELF IT'S JUST ANOTHER FIGHT--
KRAK
--A BRAWL LIKE COUNTLESS ONES BEFORE.
A CONTEST, A GAME TO WIN.
HELL, FOR THIS ONE EVERYONE EVEN GOT TO BRING GEAR. CLARK BROUGHT THE KNUCKLES.
KLANG
HE FORGED THEM IN THE FORTRESS YEARS AGO, AFTER RETURNING FROM THE DEAD.
KNUCKLES WITH MINIATURE SUNS RAGING INSIDE, ANGRY SUNS TAKEN FROM EMPTY UNIVERSES...
HE THOUGHT ABOUT CALLING THEM "DAWNSDAY" KNUCKLES, BUT LOIS SHUT THAT DOWN FAST.
EVEN SO... WITH THEM HE'S STRONGER, FASTER, READY TO THROW DOWN.
HE'S FOUGHT IN OTHER DIMENSIONS, OTHER UNIVERSES, FOUGHT GODS, TITANS...
...WHAT'S ONE MORE FIGHT?
AND THEN THE DOORS OPEN--
WHAT THE--

CHAPTER ONE: INTO THE RING

DARKSEID IS REBORN, AND NO ONE IS SAFE. THE TIME TRAVELERS OF THE DC UNIVERSE HAVE CONVENED IN A QUANTUM QUORUM TO WARN THE JUSTICE LEAGUE OF THE UNIVERSE-ENDING DISASTER...BUT THEIR WARNING HAS COME TOO LATE...

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By special arrangement with the **Jerry Siegel** family.

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Darkseid variant by **MARK SPEARS**
Showcase variant by **SCOTT KOBLISH** & **HI-FI**
1:25 variant by **NOOBOVICH**

TWO SPACES. ONE, TWO.
Whomp, whomp. GO BACK A ROW, CLARK. GREEN IS KRYPTONITE.
KRYPTONITE, DIANA?
Seriously?
I DIDN'T MAKE THE RULES!
Oh, look, "BATMOBILE BOOST." GO AHEAD THREE SPACES. NICE!
AND WHY ARE ALL THE POWER-UPS BAT-THEMED?
WHO MADE THIS THING? GIVE ME THE BOX.
"M. Malone Entert--" BRUCE...
Never heard of it. Just play the game.
I WARNED YOU... CLARK DOESN'T LIKE A GAME UNLESS NO ONE HAS TO LOSE.
Aw, LOSING BUILDS CHARACTER.
SO DOES WINNING.
Well, I FOR ONE AM GLAD YOU INVITED US. THANKS, LOIS.
OF COURSE. I JUST THOUGHT, YOU NEVER GET TO SPEND TIME TOGETHER. I MEAN, WHEN YOU'RE NOT SAVING THE WORLD.
THANKS, LO. I'M GLAD, TOO.
ME THREE.
NICE! BATPLANE POWER CARD. MOVE UP... NINE SPACES. YOUR ROLL, CLARK.

MAYBE WE SHOULD EAT.
DON'T BE LIKE THAT. THIS IS ONE OF THOSE RARE CHANCES WHEN YOU GET TO PLAY TO WIN. FOR YOURSELF. ENJOY IT.
OR YOU COULD STOP ARGUING AND ROLL. WATCH AND LEARN, BOYS...
TWELVE!
MOVE UP ONE ROW.
THEY PLAY ON. AND AS THEY DO, THEY TALK AS FRIENDS... FAMILY. NOT COLLEAGUES OR HEROES.
THEY JOKE, THEY TALK ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN... THEY DISCUSS PRIVATE THINGS WE'LL RETURN TO VERY SOON...
AN HOUR LATER, THE GAME IS STILL NOT OVER, THOUGH THEY'RE ALL WITHIN A FEW SPACES OF THE WATCHTOWER-- THE FINISH LINE.
DIANA IS ABOUT TO TOSS WHAT COULD BE THE WINNING ROLL WHEN LOIS SAYS IT...
GUYS, WHY IS IT SO BRIGHT OUT?
Dear god...

SUDDENLY, HE'S JUST THERE...

DARKSEID.

THE HEROES' *OLDEST* AND *GREATEST* FOE. MAYBE THE MOST FAMILIAR ENEMY THEY HAVE.

BUT *THIS* DARKSEID HAS BECOME SOMETHING *ELSE*.

HE ISN'T JUST BIGGER, *STRONGER*... HE'S *EVERYTHING*. A UNIVERSE OF POWER GIVEN FORM.

KRAKOOM

EVERYWHERE HE LOOKS, THE CITY BECOMES HIS. NO, CLARK THINKS, NOT *HIS*... IT BECOMES *HIM*. CLARK CAN *SEE* IT HAPPENING.

EVERY PARTICLE, EVERY MOLECULE, EVERY *ATOM* IS NOW OF *DARKSEID*.

KOOM

AS THEY CHARGE HIM, CLARK TELLS HIMSELF THEY'VE DONE THIS BEFORE. THEY'VE FOUGHT UXAS DOZENS OF TIMES AND *WON*...

BUT DEEP DOWN HE CAN FEEL IT... THIS IS *DIFFERENT*...

AND WHEN HE LOOKS AT HIS FRIENDS, HE KNOWS *THEY* FEEL IT, TOO.

GOTHAM

BECAUSE THE *BEING* OUT THERE... HE EXISTS BEYOND PHYSICS. HE'S SOMEHOW EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.

THE MYSCIRA

HE'S MORE THAN A *GOD.*

HE'S *ALL* GODLINESS.

THE ROCK OF ETERNITY

HE'S *ALL* MAGIC AND SORCERY.

OA

HE IS *ALL* THE WONDER AND *TERROR* OF THE COSMOS.

DARKSEID HAS FINALLY BECOME WHAT HE WAS MEANT TO BE--

--THE END OF EVERYTHING.

BRUCE FALLS FIRST.

THEN DIANA.

NOW, AS CLARK ROCKETS TOWARD DARKSEID AT *MACH 7*, HE HEARS A *SOUND* HE'S NEVER HEARD.

A HORRIBLE SOUND THAT *STUNS* HIM...

... STUNS HIM SO BADLY HE BARELY FEELS THE *BLAST* FROM DARKSEID...

... THE BLAST THAT *ENDS* HIM.

SUPERMAN

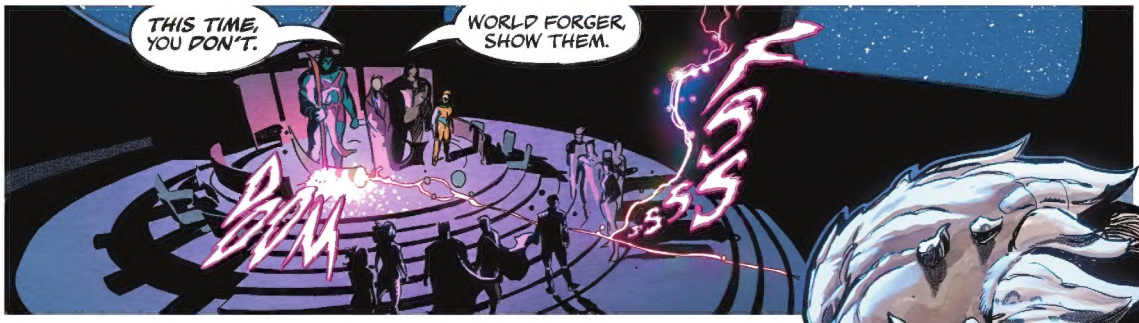
"WHEN DOES THIS HAPPEN?"

I SAID, WHEN--
IT ALREADY DID, KAL-EL.
What?
THE QUANTUM QUORUM: THE WORLD FORGER, TIME TRAPPER (A.K.A. DOOMSDAY), GRODD AND BOOSTER GOLD.

SUPERMAN, LOOK.

LOIS
Reminder! Game night, in one week. our place. no excuses.

WE OF THE QUANTUM QUORUM HAVE MANAGED TO COMBINE OUR CHRONAL POWERS TO REWIND TIME BY SEVEN DAYS.
BUT DARKSEID HAS ALREADY CONQUERED THE FUTURE. AND RIGHT NOW, HE'S MAKING HIS WAY BACK THROUGH TIME TO THIS MOMENT.
AND... GO ON. HOW DO WE STOP HIM THIS TIME?


THIS TIME, YOU DON'T.
WORLD FORGER, SHOW THEM.
BOOM
SSSSS

THE TIMELINE BEFORE YOU IS THE HISTORY OF OUR UNIVERSE. THE FLAME JUST AHEAD OF THIS MOMENT IS HIM. WE'VE EXPLORED EVERY VARIATION, AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU TRY, HE CONSUMES YOU AND MOVES ON. IT ALL ENDS HERE, IN THIS MOMENT.
WITH DARKSEID.

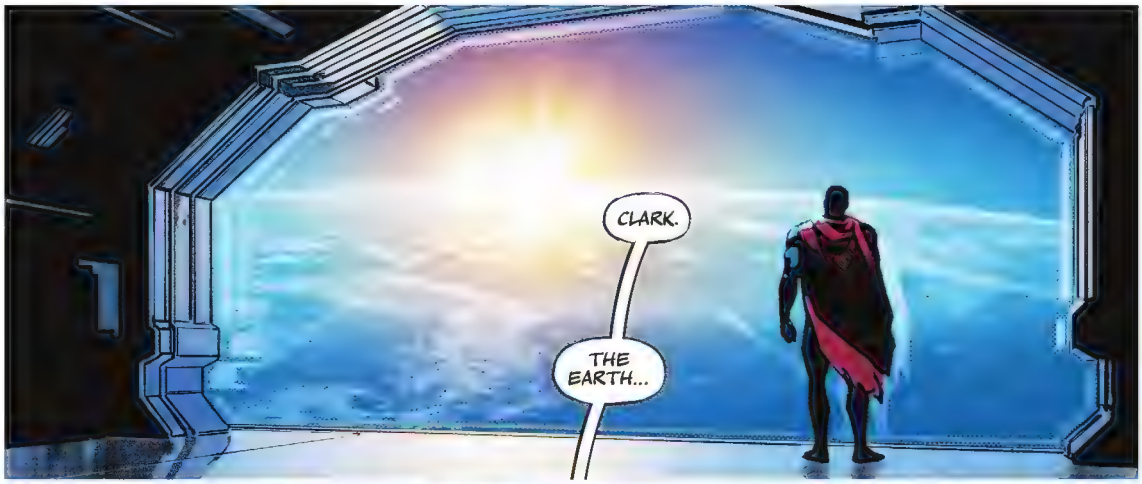
Pfft. THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING WE CAN--
NOPE.
"Nope"? BOOSTER COME ON.
HAL, WE'VE WATCHED YOU TRY A THOUSAND THINGS A THOUSAND TIMES. YOU ALWAYS LOSE.
FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN, THERE'S ONLY ONE THING YOU CAN DO.
AND WHAT'S THAT?
GIVE UP AND START OVER.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "START OVER"?
YEAH, START OVER HOW?
WE ARE THE MOST POWERFUL TEMPORAL BEINGS IN THE UNIVERSE. AND IF WE USE THE LAST BIT OF OUR ENERGY, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO--
CREATE A NEW TIMELINE FOR US
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS
TIME TRAPPER
"VERY SERIOUS, MR. TERRIFIC. NOT THAT LONG AGO, A BEING DID THIS VERY THING. HERE, AT THIS INFLECTION POINT.
"RESTARTED YOU ALL. RESTARTED EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE.* EVENTUALLY, THIS TIMELINE WAS REABSORBED, BUT FOR A BRIEF PERIOD, IT EXISTED OUTSIDE LARGER REALITY."
*As seen in The New 52! -- PK
RIGHT, AND HOW'D THAT TURN OUT FOR US AGAIN?
TO QUOTE THE GORILLA, "NOPE."
IF YOU DID THIS... WOULD WE EVEN REMEMBER? BE THE SAME PEOPLE?
NO. ALL WOULD BE NEW.

THERE'S AN ATLANTEAN PROVERB, "EVERY NEW WAVE IS ANCIENT."
THIS REALITY IS OUR HISTORY, OUR STORY. WITHOUT IT, WHAT WOULD WE BE?
ALIVE.
IN A DAMN BUBBLE.
YEAH. IT SOUNDS LIKE RUNNING, AND WE DON'T RUN.
I mean, I do, but... still.
ENOUGH. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST. QUORUM, HOW DID DARKSEID BECOME...
...THIS?
TIMEITRAPPER
"WORLD FORGER WILL SHOW YOU...
"TO UNDERSTAND HIM, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT HE SEEKS. OUR UNIVERSE IS FULL OF MYSTERIOUS ENERGIES...
"BUT SINCE ITS INCEPTION, ITS TWO MOST PRIMAL ARE THE TWIN ENERGIES WE CALL ALPHA AND OMEGA.
"ALPHA IS THE ENERGY OF CREATION, WILD AND EXPLOSIVE. NEARLY ALL PLANETS WITH LIFE ARE SOURCES OF ALPHA ENERGY. BUT NOT APOKOLIPS.
"AT APOKOLIPS'S CORE IS AN INFERNAL MACHINE, A HEART THAT RUNS ON OMEGA ENERGY. THE ENERGY OF CONQUEST, ABSORPTION, CONTROL... AND WHEN DARKSEID SOUGHT IT EONS AGO, IT CHOSE HIM AS ITS CHAMPION AND TRANSFORMED HIM INTO THE ENEMY YOU HAVE FOUGHT SO MANY TIMES.
"FROM THAT MOMENT ON HE HAS SOUGHT TO TURN EARTH, REALITY'S GREATEST SOURCE OF ALPHA ENERGY, INTO A NEW APOKOLIPS.
"AND SO WHEN HE FORMED HIS NEW UNIVERSE, HE PLACED A HEART OF APOKOLIPS AT ITS PRIMORDIAL EARTH'S CENTER.
"ALL OMEGA ENERGY IN THAT REALM FLOWS TO HIM... MAKING HIM ABSOLUTE.
"THUS, HE HAS BECOME THAT UNIVERSE'S KING OMEGA--
"--THE PERSONIFICATION OF ALL ITS OMEGA ENERGY. A WALKING SINGULARITY THAT TRANSFORMS ALL AROUND HIM."

WHICH IS WHY WE MUST ACT QUICKLY. THIS EARTH IS ALREADY TRANSFORMING UPON HIS APPROACH. MANY OF YOU HAVE LIKELY SENSED THE HEART OF APOKOLIPS GROWING AT ITS CENTER.
HENCE, THE FIRE PITS AND PARADEMONS POPPING UP AROUND THE GLOBE THIS LAST YEAR...*
*See JLU and Aquaman! -- PK.O
HOLD ON. IF THERE'S A HEART OF APOKOLIPS FORMING AT THE CENTER OF OUR EARTH, RIGHT NOW, COULD WE USE IT TO TRANSFORM ONE OF US INTO SOMETHING LIKE HIM? A "KING OMEGA"?
Hm. THAT'S AN IDEA--
A TERRIBLE &%#!* IDEA.
IMPOSSIBLE. THE HEART IS COSMICALLY CONNECTED TO DARKSEID.
IT SERVES HIM ONLY.
TO CHANGE THAT, YOU'D NEED TO RESTART IT ENTIRELY. BLAST IT WITH OMEGA ENERGY YOU DON'T HAVE.
NO, BUT BOOSTER DOES. WATCHTOWER READINGS SHOW HIM BRIMMING WITH IT FROM BEING TRAPPED WITH DARKSEID FOR YEARS!
HE COULD USE THAT POWER TO BLAST THE HEART. COSMICALLY DEFIBRILLATE IT.
I don't...
...THINK YOU COMPREHEND WHAT YOU'D BE UNLEASHING.

SO SHOW US.
WORLD FORGER?
YOU MUST UNDERSTAND. THE HEART IS A LIVING THING, SENTIENT. REBORN, IT WOULD IMMEDIATELY SEEK A CHAMPION. SOMEONE FUELED BY CONQUEST AND CONQUEST ONLY. YOU ALL, YOU'RE HEROES. YOU'RE--
SOFT AS HELL.
EVEN HUNGRY AND NEW, IT WOULD NOT LET YOUR KIND NEAR IT. IT WOULD DEFEND ITSELF.
DEFEND ITSELF HOW?
IT'S FOURTH-DIMENSIONAL. NOT BOUND BY OUR PHYSICS. BY MY CALCULATIONS, IT WOULD RESHAPE ITSELF TO TEST YOU, CREATE A TOURNAMENT. EACH OF THESE RINGS WOULD BE A HIGHER LEVEL OF CHALLENGE.
PFFT. WE CAN TAKE ON SOME MEASLY PARA-DEMONS.
NOT PARADEMONS, IDIOT. EACH OTHER. YOU WOULD BE COMPETING WITH EACH OTHER.
What?
YES. IT'D BE A COMPETITION TO FIND AN ULTIMATE CONQUEROR AMONG YOU. A CHAMPION.
TO PROVE YOU'RE WORTHY, ONE OF YOU WOULD HAVE TO DEFEAT ALL THE OTHERS, AND THEN DEFEAT THE HEART ITSELF.
THEN THE UNIVERSE WILL BEND TOWARD YOU. YOU WILL BECOME THE SOLE CELESTIAL ENTITY.
WORLD FORGER
"A BEING-- PERHAPS-- CAPABLE OF FACING DARKSEID."

AND THIS PERSON, IF THEY DO DEFEAT DARKSEID, THEY COULD BRING IT ALL BACK ON THE OTHER SIDE?
EVERY-ONE AND EVERYTHING LOST?
I MEAN, IN THEORY? WHOEVER WINS SHOULD BE ABLE TO RESHAPE THE UNIVERSE HOWEVER THEY WANT.
WHY ARE YOU ENCOURAGING THIS?
BECAUSE I SAW THE TERROR THAT HE IS, TIME TRAPPER! I WAS HELD PRISONER IN THAT "ABSOLUTE" REALM FOR YEARS. EONS. AND MAYBE THE ONLY THING THAT CAN STOP HIM...
...IS SOMEONE LIKE HIM.
FINE. THEN ANSWER ME THIS, HEROES. THE HEART RESPONDS ONLY TO OMEGA ENERGY, THE ENERGY OF CONQUEST.
EVERY RING YOU ENTER WILL TEST YOU FURTHER IN STRENGTH, CUNNING, STRATEGY... AND TO PREVAIL, YOU MUST FILL THE HEART'S FIREPITS TO MATCH DARKSEID'S POWER. THAT MEANS YOU MUST COMPETE ONLY TO WIN. NO MERCY. NO COMPASSION...
CAN YOU TRULY DO THAT?
FORGET IT.
WE'RE NOT DOING THIS.


CLARK.
THE EARTH...

...IT'S ALREADY HIS. WE'VE KNOWN IT ALL YEAR. EVER SINCE DARKSEID DISAPPEARED.* YOU'VE FELT IT, WE'VE FELT IT. WE JUST DIDN'T WANT TO ADMIT IT.
*See the DC All In Special! -- Paul "Knocked Out in Round One" Kaminski

WE DO THIS...REALLY DO IT, AND WHAT'S TO STOP THE VILLAINS FROM FOLLOWING US DOWN THERE?
BRUCE, IMAGINE JOKER IN THIS "TOURNAMENT." IMAGINE LEX. IF THEY WERE TO WIN, HAVE THAT POWER...
I CAN'T. OR CHEETAH, OR ANY OF THE WORST. SO WE WON'T LET THEM.

YOU SPENT THE LAST YEAR TURNING THE PHANTOM ZONE FROM SOMETHING PUNITIVE INTO A PLACE OF HEALING. WE PUT OUR ADVERSARIES THERE FOR NOW, TO KEEP THEM SAFE.
...AND KEEP THEM OUT.

Even if we could... IF WE GO COMPETE IN THIS THING, WHO'S GOING TO PROTECT THE WORLD WHILE WE'RE GONE?

THAT'S WHAT THE LEAGUE IS DISCUSSING RIGHT NOW.
THIS COULD WORK, CLARK. THINK ABOUT IT.
BUT WHAT CLARK THINKS ABOUT IS THE MOMENT HE CHARGED DARKSEID.
AND THAT TERRIBLE SOUND, THE ONE THAT STOPPED HIM IN HIS TRACKS.
IT WAS THE SOUND OF EVERY HEART ON EARTH SUDDENLY DOING THE SAME THING. NOT STOPPING OR DYING...
...BUT FALLING INTO UNISON. ALL THE VARIETY, PEOPLE, FISH, BIRDS, BUGS, THE WHOLE STRANGE, WONDERFUL MESS OF IT ALIGNING IN A SINGLE RHYTHM...
...DARKSEID'S.
IT'S A GAME, CLARK.
ONE WE PLAY TO THE DEATH, AGAINST EACH OTHER.
NO. AGAINST HIM. REMEMBER THAT, AND IT BECOMES YOUR FAVORITE KIND. LIKE LOIS SAID. THE KIND WHERE NO ONE REALLY LOSES.
THE KIND WE ALL WIN. TOGETHER.

CHAPTER II

AND SO THEY DECIDE.

THEY HAVE ONE WEEK.

SEVEN DAYS
TO PREPARE THE WORLD
AND THEMSELVES.

THEN, ON THE SEVENTH DAY, JUST
BEFORE DARKSEID ARRIVES, THEY WILL
ENTER THE HEART AND COMPETE TO
BECOME ITS CHAMPION.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE QUANTUM
QUORUM WILL USE ALL THAT IS
LEFT OF THEIR CHRONAL POWERS
TO SLOW TIME AND STAVE
OFF DARKSEID'S APPROACH.

HOPEFULLY IT WILL BE
LONG ENOUGH FOR A HERO
TO CLAIM THE HEART.

HOPEFULLY...

ON THE FIRST DAY, THEY MOVE TO SECURE THE VILLAINS.
MODIFIED T-SPHERES ARE SENT TO A LIST OF THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS CRIMINALS.
TERRIFIC HATES WHAT THEY ARE ABOUT TO DO.
GO ON.
BUT HE ALSO KNOWS THAT THIS IS ABOUT AS FAIR AS THEY CAN BE RIGHT NOW.
WORK.
WORK.
WORK.
GET TO WORK.
WORK.
WORK.

ARKHAM TOWER

THE SPHERES RE-ENTER THE ATMOSPHERE SILENTLY, EACH HOMING IN ON ITS TARGET.

Well, HELLO, THERE.

--WHO DARES TO--

CUTE TOY.

WHERE DO YOU PUT THE @%#&* BATTERIES?

BELLE REVE PRISON

ANY CRIMINAL WHO THE WATCHTOWER ASSIGNED A POWER LEVEL OF SIX OR HIGHER IS TARGETED.

SOME ARE ALREADY LOCKED UP...

AIN'T YOU PRETTY...

OTHERS ARE HIDDEN FAR FROM SIGHT.

WHAT DID YOU DO NOW, ARTHUR?

NANDA PARBAT

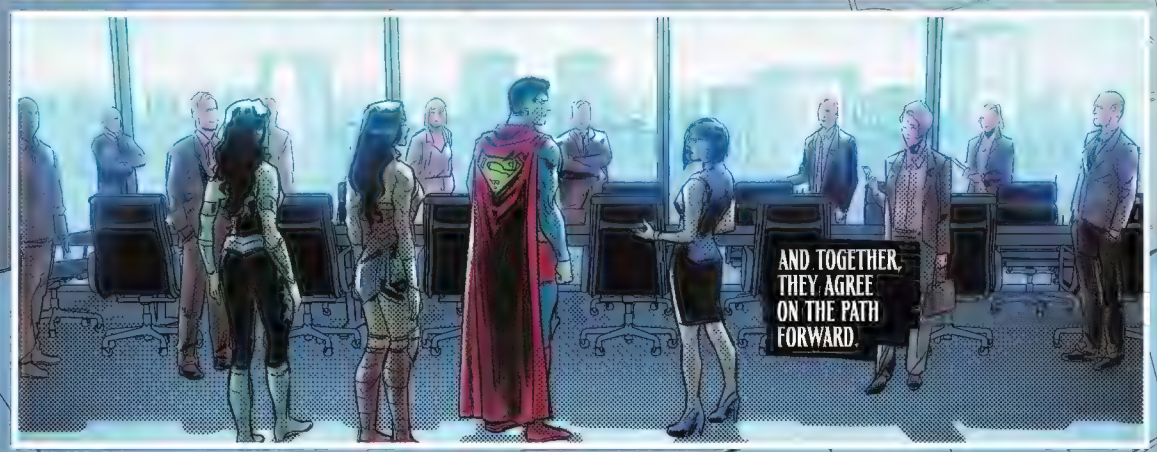
I ★!@?# KNEW IT.

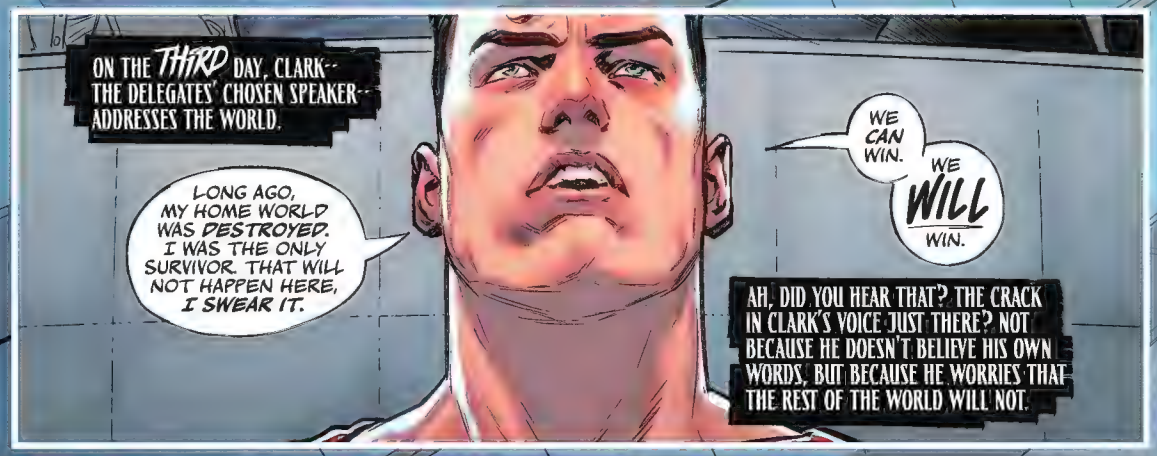
YOU THINK YOU CAN OUTSMART ME?! LEX LUTHOR?!

YOU'LL REGRET THIS, SUPERMAN. I PROMISE YOU...

ALL ARE TAKEN OFF THE GAME BOARD...

On the second day, the heroes meet with world leaders.


And together, they agree on the path forward.


On the third day, Clark-- the delegates' chosen speaker-- addresses the world.
Long ago, my home world was destroyed. I was the only survivor. That will not happen here, I swear it.
We can win.
We will win.
Ah, did you hear that? The crack in Clark's voice just there? Not because he doesn't believe his own words, but because he worries that the rest of the world will not.

He steels himself as he explains the plan...

...explains how the world's most powerful companies--
--LexCorp, Wayne Enterprises, Queen Industries, and ten others--
--have joined forces to create Mega-ARKs.
All fitted with adapted Brainiac tech to contain and preserve everyone and everything.
All part of the largest evacuation plan ever undertaken, just in case things get worse in the coming days.
He explains about how the Titans will stay behind, along with Mr. Terrific. How the Earth will still be protected.
And then, at the end of his remarks, Clark says something unscripted.
"Listen," he says, "I've seen a lot in my life. And this universe, it's special. It's messy... it's infuriating sometimes... but it's us. It exists because we believe in it. And it's worth fighting for. Even like this."

THE FOURTH DAY, THE HEROES SPEND WITH THEIR FAMILIES.

AS HE WALKS WITH LOIS, JON, AND KARA THROUGH THE CITY HE LOVES, CLARK REMINDS HIMSELF THAT THIS IS FOR THEM.

ALL OF THEM.

ALL THOSE HEARTBEATS, THE MYRIAD OF THEM, ALL DIFFERENT. ALL SCARED.

HE LISTENS TO THE HEARTBEAT OF THE PLANET ITSELF...

... THE BLUE-GREEN WHIR. AND HE HEARS SOMETHING BENEATH IT NOW.

A CRACKLE, A FIRE. SOMETHING UGLY GROWING...

HEY.

YOU CAN DO THIS.

ON THE FIFTH DAY, THEY PREPARE FOR THE TOURNAMENT. THEY GO TO WAR ROOMS AND BUNKERS AND SACRED VAULTS AND CHOOSE THEIR GEAR.
WHAT TO PICK, THOUGH, WHEN THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT CHALLENGES THE TOURNAMENT WILL BRING?
SOME GO ON OFFENSE.
JUSTICE BUSTER TWO. POWER UP.
OTHERS GO FOR STRATEGY.
GODKILLER ARMOR.
AWAKEN.

A FEW CHOOSE DEFENSIVE MEASURES.
FATHER BOX UPGRADE. GO.
OTHERS, LIKE CLARK, JUST CHOOSE WHAT FEELS RIGHT.
IT'S A GAME WE CAN ALL WIN.

ON THE SIXTH DAY, IT'S TIME.
WITH THE VILLAINS LOCKED AWAY, AND THE WORLD FORTIFIED AND PREPARED...
...THEY SET OFF. MANY OF THEM ARE SELFLESS, SOME ARE MORE... COMPLICATED.
HUMANS, ALIENS, GODS, MONSTERS...
...OVER A HUNDRED OF THE WORLD'S HEROES IN ALL.
THEY'RE FRIENDS, MANY ARE MORE THAN FRIENDS, BUT RIGHT NOW THEY'RE HEADED TO COMPETE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN A TOURNAMENT WITHOUT MERCY.
THE CLOSER THEY GET, THE LESS REAL IT FEELS...

AND SUDDENLY THEY'VE ARRIVED.
THE SKARTARIS NEXUS, A PASSAGE TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH--
--WHERE THE HEART OF APOKOLIPS NOW THRUMS.
ALL RIGHT, BOOSTER. YOU READY?
YOU'RE JOKING, RIGHT?
OKAY, FOLKS. LET'S CAUSE A COSMIC HEART ATTACK.
RAAA
IS IT WORKING?!
I CAN'T TELL!
THE READINGS ARE--

CHAPTER III

THE BLAST IS *JUST* ENOUGH TO STOP THE HEART. FOR NO MORE THAN A FEW HUNDRED ZEPTOSECONDS, PLANCK TIME, BUT IT'S ENOUGH.

WHEN THE HEART BEGINS AGAIN, BLANK AND NEW AND TERRIBLE, THE FIRST THING IT SEES IS THEM. THE HEROES, ROCKETING TOWARD IT.

TO WELCOME THEM, IT GIVES THEM EACH A MIRACULOUS *VISION.*

EVERY HERO SUDDENLY *SEES* THEMSELVES **WIN.**

BLUE BEETLE, DETECTIVE CHIMP, AQUAMAN. EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM *FEELS* WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO BECOME THE HEART'S CHAMPION, THE *SOLE GOD,* TO HAVE THE UNIVERSE BEND TO THEM--

--NO, MORE THAN BEND, TO HAVE IT RE-FORM AROUND THEIR IDEAS, THEIR BELIEFS...

THEY SEE THE *GOOD* THEY COULD DO, SO MUCH GOOD...

...BUT JUST AS QUICKLY AS IT APPEARED, THE VISION VANISHES, GIVES WAY TO DARKNESS, AND THEY EACH LOOK AROUND TO FIND THEMSELVES WAITING AT THE ARENA GATES.

AND JUST LIKE THAT, THE **TOURNAMENT** IS UPON THEM.

WHAT THE--

THOK!

WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED.

GET BACK!

WAIT FOR ALL THE COMBATANTS.

Well, WHAT ARE WE PLAYIN'?!

THOSE OF YOU WHO CROSS THE GAUNTLET EARLY SHALL MOVE ON. THE REST *PERISH*. BUT BEWARE...

...ONE *WRONG STEP*, AND YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF...

...OUT.

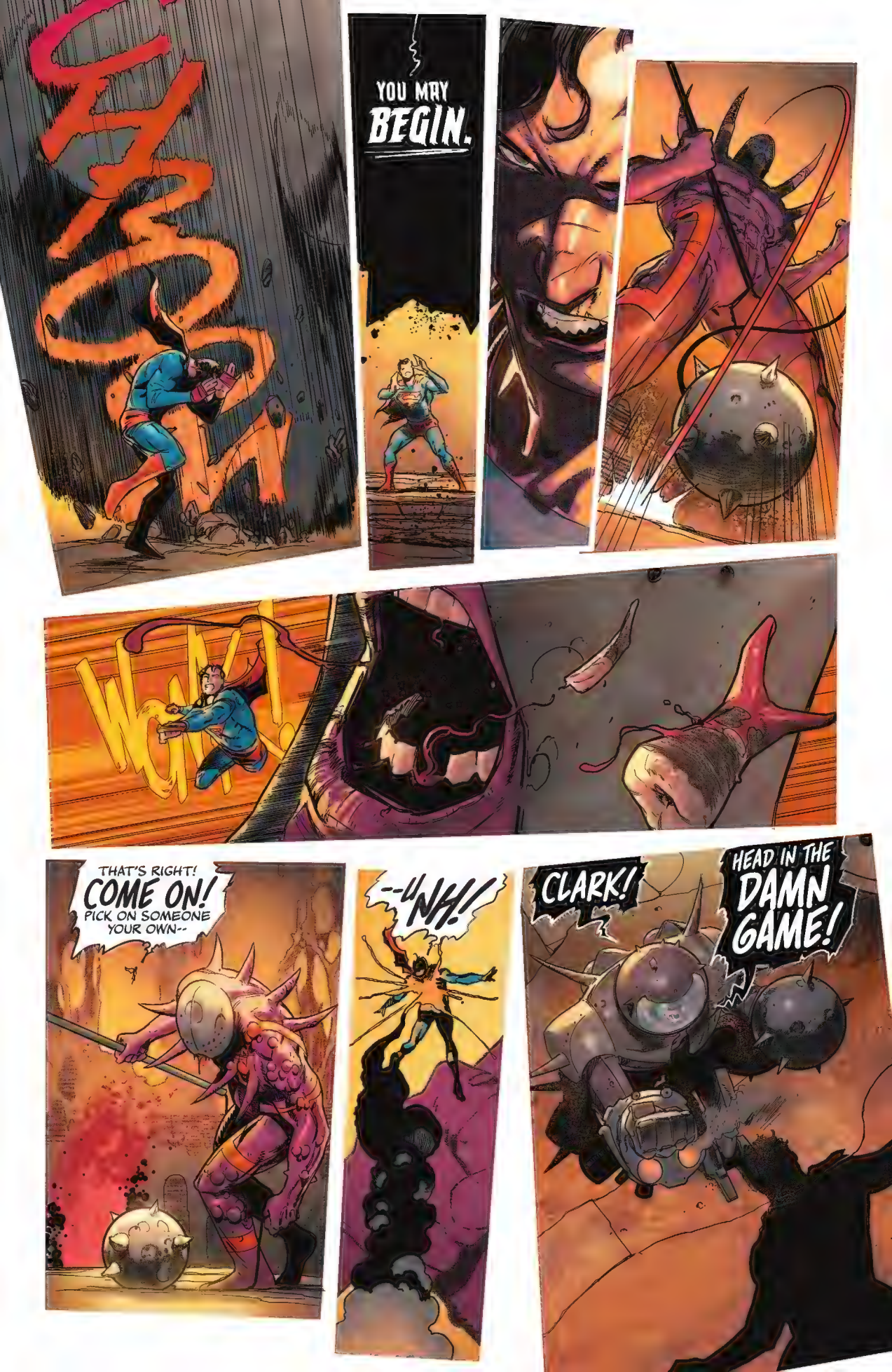
THE CONTEST BEGINS AT THE DROP OF THE *HELL MACE*.

Well, well. LOOKS LIKE WE'LL *FINALLY* GET TO SEE WHO'D WIN. SUPERMAN OR *THE CAPTAIN!*

Billy--

Oh, YOU'RE GOING DOWN, BIG BLUE...

SHAZAM


YOU MAY BEGIN.
THAT'S RIGHT! COME ON! PICK ON SOMEONE YOUR OWN--
--UH!
CLARK!
HEAD IN THE DAMN GAME!

HE KNOWS BRUCE IS RIGHT. THE GAUNTLET IS FULL OF BOOBY-TRAPPED TILES. THE GOLIATHS' WEAPONS FALL LIKE THUNDER. BUT IF THEY'RE GOING TO GENERATE ENOUGH OMEGA ENERGY--
--HE NEEDS TO PLAY TO WIN.
THEY ALL DO.
OUTTA MY WAY, BABY!
THIS IS WHERE DAMAGE FINALLY GETS TO...
BEEP BEEP BEEP
...SHINE?
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP
...ALANNA I--
IT'S A GAME, CLARK THINKS.
SEE IT AS A GAME...

UP AHEAD, JAY GARRICK IS RACING TOWARD THE GLOWING PORTAL MARKING THE END ZONE...

...WHEN HE TOO TAKES A BAD STEP...

BEEP BEEP BE

...AND TRIGGERS THEIR ARRIVAL.

No...

A FORM OF PARADEMON FROM THE FARTHEST POINT IN TIME, WHERE DARKSEID IS AT FULL SATURATION--

OMEGADEMONS.

MADE FROM ALL SPECIES OF LIFE.

ZIRK

SHOOM

MOVE OVER, ZOMBIE BOY! THAT CROWN IS MINE!

POW!

YOU KNOW, HARLEY, THIS IS PRETTY MUCH EXACTLY HOW I PICTURE THE INSIDE OF YOUR MIND?

PFFT. ON A SLOW DAY.

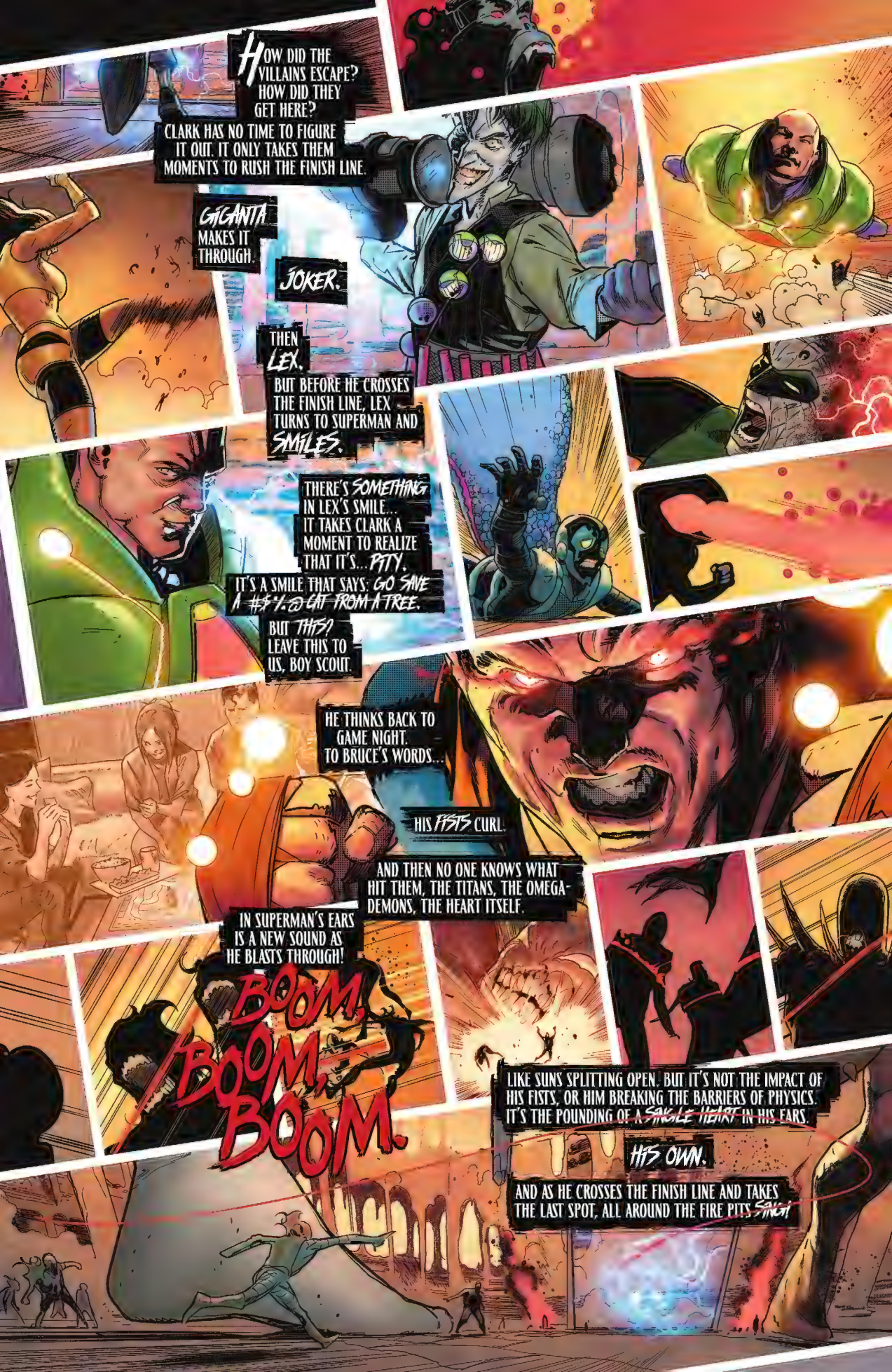
OTNI WODAHS.

--BACK TO HELL!

KING ME, BABY! KING ME!

=Huff=
=Hff=
=Hf=
LOOK OUT!
OBSCURE CHARACTER IN A MASSIVE LINE-WIDE EVENT COMING THROUGH! I'M AT EXTREMELY HIGH RISK OF DEATH!
SHUNK
TRIP
YOU FRAGGIN' SAID IT, MAN, NOT ME.
CLARK THROWS HIMSELF AT THE OMEGADEMONS.
HEAT VISION, FREEZE BREATH, KILOTON PUNCHES.
THE KNUCKLES BURN. HE TELLS HIMSELF HE'S DOING IT, COMPETING.
IN THE SHADOWS, THE FIRE PITS HISS, ANGRILY.
BEHIND HIM, HEROES BEGIN TO CROSS THE FINISH LINE. DIANA, MARI, KARA...
BUT IF YOU LOOK AT HIM-- REALLY LOOK-- HE'S NOT.
BECAUSE, WITHOUT EVEN REALIZING IT, CLARK IS HANGING BACK. INSTEAD OF BLASTING THROUGH HE'S CLEARING THE WAY FOR HIS FRIENDS.
MORE MAKE IT THROUGH. FIVE, TEN... THE PORTAL BEGINS TO SHRINK.
CLARK FIGHTS ON.
FIFTEEN ARE THROUGH. THE PORTAL SHRINKS FURTHER. HOW MANY WILL BE ALLOWED TO CROSS BEFORE IT CLOSES? NOW EIGHTEEN. CARTER MAKES NINETEEN...
IT OCCURS TO CLARK THAT HE HASN'T SEEN BRUCE CROSS YET. WHICH SURPRISES HIM.
IF ANYONE WAS GOING TO MAKE IT THROUGH--
SUPERMAN!
BATMAN, WH--
FOCUS! YOU NEED TO STAY...
...sha'pz
KRAK
BATMAN!!
THE NEXT PART HAPPENS IN SLOW MOTION.

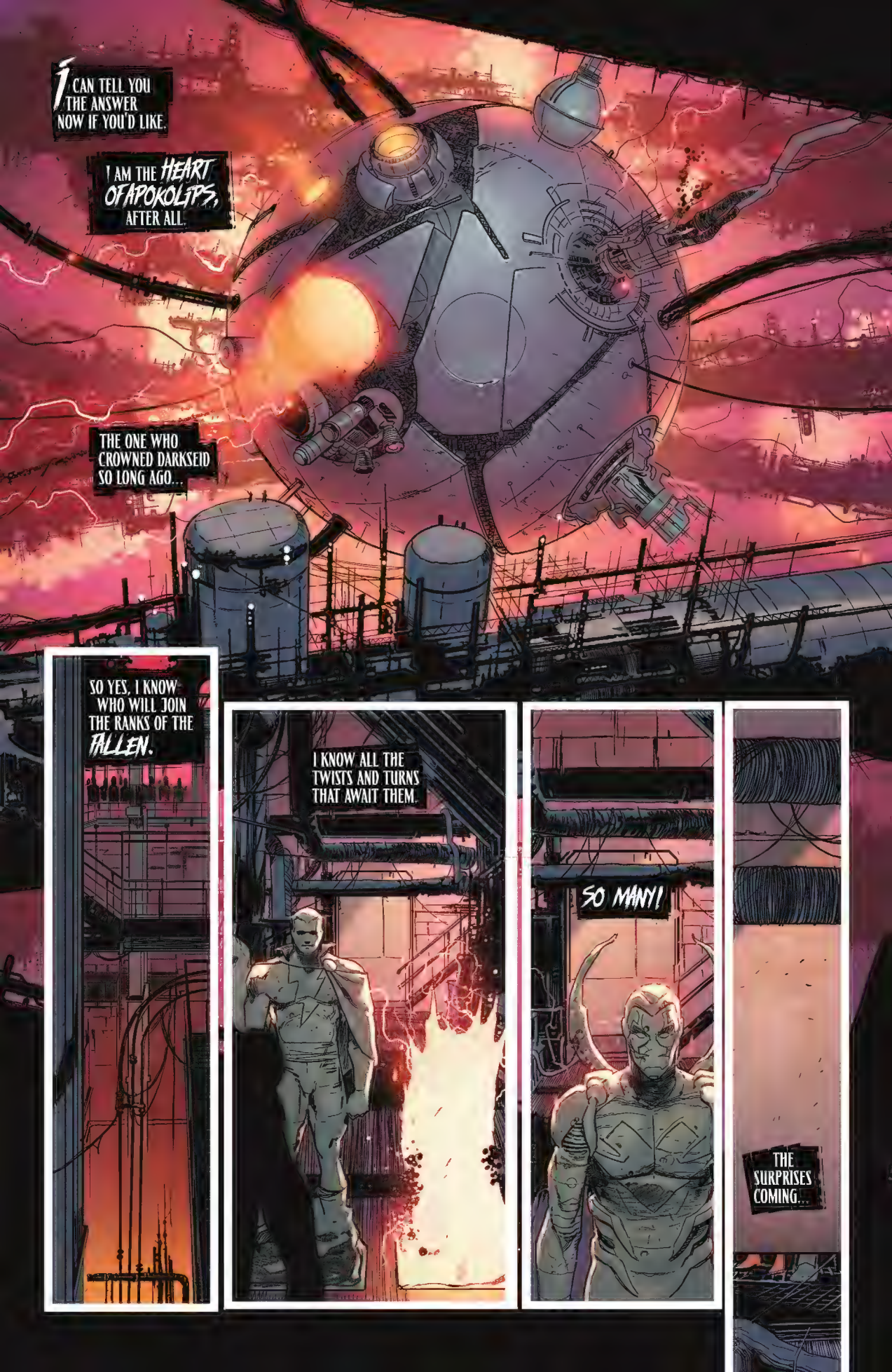
THE FLAG UNFURLS.
BAM
"BANG."
THEN A BLAST HITS CLARK, KNOCKING HIM OFF HIS FEET...
...AND WHEN HE LOOKS UP, THEY'RE ALL RIGHT THERE.
Huh... I GUESS BATMAN DOESN'T ALWAYS WIN?
HAHAHA
Clark.
Bruce?
Remember what I... said...


How did the villains escape? How did they get here?
Clark has no time to figure it out. It only takes them moments to rush the finish line.
Gigantа makes it through.
Joker.
Then Lex.
But before he crosses the finish line, Lex turns to Superman and smiles.
There's something in Lex's smile... It takes Clark a moment to realize that it's... pity.
It's a smile that says: Go save a #$%. cat from a tree.
But this? Leave this to us, boy scout.
He thinks back to game night. To Bruce's words...
His fists curl.
And then no one knows what hit them, the Titans, the Omega-demons, the heart itself.
In Superman's ears is a new sound as he blasts through!
BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.
Like suns splitting open. But it's not the impact of his fists, or him breaking the barriers of physics. It's the pounding of a single heart in his ears.
His own.
And as he crosses the finish line and takes the last spot, all around the fire pits single

NOW BEHOLD! YOUR 32 CHAMPIONS!

WHO WILL WIN AND BE CROWNED THE KING OMEGA?!

CAN YOU GUESS?


I CAN TELL YOU THE ANSWER NOW IF YOU'D LIKE.
I AM THE HEART OF APOKOLIPS, AFTER ALL.
THE ONE WHO CROWNED DARKSEID SO LONG AGO...
SO YES, I KNOW WHO WILL JOIN THE RANKS OF THE FALLEN.
I KNOW ALL THE TWISTS AND TURNS THAT AWAIT THEM.
SO MANY!
THE SURPRISES COMING...

...LIKE HIS THREE DESTROYERS.

HORSEMEN, FROM A WORLD WHERE HIS RULE IS ABSOLUTE. MONSTERS.

AND THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE HORRORS THAT AWAIT.

BUT IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE REAL TRUTH, THE FINAL ONE, I'LL TELL YOU...

...IT'S THAT NONE OF THEM WIN. NOT CLARK, NOT DIANA, NOT MARI OR EEL.

NONE.

BECAUSE WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW IS THAT THERE IS ONE LAST CHAMPION AMONG THEM...

...THE KING HIMSELF.
THAT'S RIGHT... DARKSEID. HAVING TAKEN THE FORM OF ONE OF THEIR OWN.
SO NO, FRIEND, THE GAME ISN'T BEGINNING...
IT'S ALREADY OVER.

NEXT ISSUE:

DC
KO
SUPERMAN
GIGANTA
CAPTAIN ATOM
POWER GIRL
GUY GARDNER
FIRESTORM
JAY GARRICK
CHEETAH
AQUAMAN
KING SHARK
CONNOR HAWKE
HAWKMAN
LEX LUTHOR
BLACK LIGHTNING
THE DEMON
SUPERGIRL
WONDER WOMAN
STARRO
LOBO
PLASTIC MAN
SWAMP THING
VIXEN
CYBORG
BATWOMAN
BATMAN
STAR SAPPHIRE
RED HOOD
DAMIAN WAYNE
ZATANNA
BARDA
HARLEY QUINN
METAMORPHO
WHO WILL WIN?
Ω

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"Masterfully blends high-octane action with emotional depth."—AIPT

BLACK CANARY™
BEST OF THE BEST

BLACK CANARY VS. LADY SHIVA!

SIX ROUNDS. ONE CHAMPION.

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Written by
TOM KING

Art by
RYAN SOOK

HARDCOVER
COLLECTED EDITION
AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER

DC NATION SPOTLIGHT ON

DC K.O.

DON'T MISS A SINGLE ROUND OF DC'S KNOCK-DOWN, DRAG-OUT, FIGHT OF THE CENTURY!

OCTOBER:

- ☐ *JUSTICE LEAGUE: THE OMEGA ACT*
- ☐ *DC K.O.* #1
- ☐ *TITANS* #28
- ☐ *SUPERMAN* #31
- ☐ *THE FLASH* #26
- ☐ *JUSTICE LEAGUE UNLIMITED* #12

NOVEMBER:

- ☐ *DC K.O. KNIGHTFIGHT* #1
- ☐ *AQUAMAN* #11
- ☐ *TITANS* #29
- ☐ *DC K.O.* #2
- ☐ *SUPERMAN* #32
- ☐ *THE FLASH* #27
- ☐ *JUSTICE LEAGUE UNLIMITED* #13

***DC K.O.* EXPLODES IN DECEMBER WITH ALL-FIGHT MONTH, AND THE BATTLE CONTINUES THROUGH MARCH 2026!**

ALL IN

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